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Mr L Jones  
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Dear Mr Jones

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Information and communication technology (ICT) and modern languages (ML)

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during our visit on 28-29 January 2009 to look at work in ICT and ML.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on the quality of assessment.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

### Information and communication technology

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of seven part lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be satisfactory.

### Achievement and standards in ICT

Achievement is satisfactory. Standards are broadly in line with the national average.

- Students enter the school with standards which are broadly in line with the national average. However literacy skills are weaker with many students entering the school with a reading age below, and in many cases well below, their actual age.
- The headline judgement masks the wide variation in the ICT standards the students enter with. The vast majority of students are much more

confident with the communication and presenting information strand and less so with databases and spreadsheets.

- By the end of Key Stage 3 students reach standards which are in line with the national average and therefore students make satisfactory progress at Key Stage 3 in ICT. However the students' analysis and evaluation skills are weak.
- At Key Stage 4 those students who complete an accredited ICT course make good progress. The students who study the ICT National Curriculum but do not complete an accredited course make satisfactory progress.
- Students are taught how to stay safe when they are using new technologies in Year 7 in ICT. They are also able to discuss the issues in personal, social and health education and enterprise education. The students spoken to were aware of what they needed to do to stay safe. Year 11 students were also aware of some of the dangers of phishing. The very rare incidents of cyber-bullying are dealt with quickly and effectively.
- When students are using the computers they behave satisfactorily. They listen to the member of staff, and to each other, and are prepared to help and support each other.
- Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are given the opportunity to use ICT to support their learning, especially in literacy and numeracy. These students make the same progress as their peers.
- The school is making innovative use of ICT to support students who would otherwise become 'school refusers' through the use of online live lessons.

## Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory with some good features.

- Members of staff have good working relationships with the students.
- Members of staff have good subject knowledge, particularly with respect to the requirements of the examination courses. This means that the Key Stage 4 lessons are closely linked to the examination criteria. Therefore the students know exactly what they need to do to improve their work and achieve their target grade. The tracking of students' work means that students are fully aware of the progress they are making.
- In some lessons, however, there was too much teacher talk. This meant that students were not always able to demonstrate their learning.
- In most lessons there were few opportunities for the students to develop their knowledge and understand of ICT by self and peer assessing their work. There were also few opportunities for students to develop their evaluation and analysis skills, particularly at Key Stage 3. This means that students do not always consider how they could improve their work, why their work is appropriate and how they could have done it differently.
- The speed and reliability of the computer network hinders the amount of progress the students can make. The network is very slow with students often taking up to five minutes to log on. This also meant that

students had the opportunity to engage in low level disruption while problems were solved and some of them took advantage of this opportunity. The department ensures that these problems with the network do not hinder overall progress by offering extra classes for the Key Stage 4 students studying for an accredited ICT course to complete their work.

- New technologies were used well in a science lesson and a mathematics lesson. Students used voting pads and graphical calculators to show their learning. The use of the new technologies enhanced the pace of the lesson and motivated the students to learn.

## Quality of the curriculum for ICT

The curriculum is satisfactory.

- The department has altered the Key Stage 3 curriculum to make it more relevant to the students. This development includes a video module in Year 8 and work which more appropriately meets the increasingly varied needs and interests of the students.
- At Key Stage 4 all students study ICT. In the recent past not all students completed all the elements of the statutory ICT National Curriculum. However the leadership and management of the subject realised this and put in place strategies to rectify it. These measures are impacting positively on the provision for students.
- The students are able to participate in a wide range of extra curricular activities concerning ICT. Recently a group of students were involved in the 'Big Ideas Youth Challenge' which involved them designing a secure and safe mobile phone for teenagers.
- The students are using ICT as part of their work in many subjects. However, their achievement in ICT when working in other subjects is not fed back to the ICT department which is unaware of how well students are doing across the school.

## Leadership and management of ICT

The leadership and management are satisfactory.

- You can not apply the principles of best value: challenge, compare, consult, competition because of the limitations of the contract for the new school.
- The specialist engineering status has enabled the school to purchase new resources. These are being integrated into the curriculum and have improved the motivation of the students and the quality of the design technology products they are able to produce. Engineering status is also enabling the school to offer systems and control GCSE from 2009.
- The continuing professional development (CPD) needs of all staff are audited each year. A programme of CPD is in place for all staff.
- Departmental self evaluation is in place. This does identify the areas for improvement. There is a departmental development plan. However many of actions are not measurable and focus more on developing provision than on improving outcomes for students.

- ICT is well managed strategically to support the personal development of the students. This involves using new technology to improve communication with parents and reduce student' absence.

### Use of Assessment

The use of assessment is satisfactory.

- Work at Key Stage 3 is assessed in line with the ICT National Curriculum levels. The students receive feedback on their work. This includes the work they have completed and what they need to do next. However many of the comments are based on the tasks the students need to complete rather than how to improve the work they have completed.
- At Key Stage 3 many of the students do not know what level they are at, they are also unaware of their target level.
- At Key Stage 4 students' work is marked regularly. The assessment links to the examination criteria and the comments clearly explain to the students what they have to do to improve their work.
- In most Key Stage 4 lessons assessment data was used well to ensure the students understood the work they had to complete.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing the evaluation and analysis skills of the students particularly at Key Stage 3
- improving teaching and learning to ensure that lessons meet the needs and interests of all the students and that all students make good progress
- co-ordinating the ICT work students do across the curriculum
- ensuring that the assessment of students' work at Key Stage 3 enables the students to make better progress.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop ICT in the school.

### Modern Languages

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with three groups of students, staff, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML was judged to be satisfactory.

### Achievement and standards

Achievement is satisfactory. Standards are well below average.

- Although the school now operates a three year Key Stage 3 programme of study, for the academic year 2007-8 the school changed the length of its Key Stage 3 curriculum to a two year programme. Many students decided not to continue with French in Year 9. There

were therefore no assessments for most students in this year group at the end of 2008, making comparisons with national figures difficult. School assessments for students at the end of Year 8 in 2007 and 2008 indicate that standards were well below average. This is confirmed by school assessments of current Year 9 students which indicate that only 8% of students are currently working at the expected Level 5 and 30% at Level 4 although the school expects these figures to improve as the year progresses.

- The number of students taking languages in Key Stage 4 is small. Standards in French were above average with 71% of students achieving an A\*-C grade at GCSE level. In Spanish, standards were lower and only 25% of students attained an A\*-C grade at GCSE level. No students attained the higher A\*-A grades in either subject.
- One student was entered for examinations in her home language and attained an A\* grade.
- The progress made by students in Key Stage 3 is satisfactory overall. In Key Stage 4, students make good progress.
- Students' reading and listening skills are developing satisfactorily. Students in Key Stage 4 are developing a good grasp of grammar. Writing skills are adequate and there are some opportunities for students to write at length. Speaking skills are weaker. Many students are reluctant to speak and the pronunciation of some is heavily anglicised. Opportunities for students to practise speaking in lessons and to become more confident are not always fully exploited.
- Students have an adequate understanding of the importance of learning a language and of how they could benefit their future career prospects.
- Students' intercultural understanding is underdeveloped. Students could cite basic differences between British and French culture and name some countries where French and Spanish are spoken.
- Students' behaviour is generally good in lessons, except where learning activities are pitched too high. Students usually listen well to instructions and collaborate with others when asked to do so. Consequently, ML makes a satisfactory contribution to students' personal development and well-being.

#### Quality of teaching and learning in ML

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. Lessons observed ranged from good to inadequate. Lessons are well planned, but opportunities for speaking are not always identified. Learning objectives are routinely shared with students and in some lessons observed were referred back to. Interactive whiteboards are used in all lessons. Plenary sessions at the end of lessons are not always well used to assess the progress students have made and to reinforce new learning.
- Teachers' subject knowledge and pronunciation is good overall and very good in French.

- Satisfactory use is made of the target language in lessons but some opportunities for its use are missed. There is some effective use of the target language in the marking of students' books.
- There is some good use of language learning strategies. In a good Year 7 French lesson, students were taught to think about how verb endings in English change so as to remind them of how and why the verb 'avoir' is conjugated. However, in another Spanish lesson, opportunities to use cognates to help students remember the meanings of new words were missed.
- Specialist vocabulary about language is well used in some lessons. This was a strong feature of a Year 10 Spanish lesson where students revised infinitives, definite and indefinite articles, tenses and the agreement of nouns and adjectives.
- There are some useful, but unimaginative, displays in classrooms to remind students of grammar rules and key words. There are few instances of exemplary work by students which other learners can learn from and aspire to.
- Formal assessments takes place each half term and each assessment focuses on one of the key skills. All work is marked and there are some useful comments to guide students on how to improve their work.
- Most students have a satisfactory understanding of their targets and what they must do to achieve these. Most know how they have performed in their most recent assessment but some are less clear about the overall level they are currently working at.

## Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- Following the school's decision to revert to a three year Key Stage 3 curriculum, the department has successfully re-established language teaching in Year 9.
- All students learn a language at Key Stage 3. Following a period of major staffing and curricular change at the school, students now learn both French and Spanish in Year 7 and then choose to concentrate on one language in Years 8 and 9. A small group of Year 7 students with very weak literacy skills are withdrawn from mainstream languages teaching for part of the year but receive some lessons in ML from their assigned teacher to maintain their language skills.
- Students' entitlement to study a language at Key Stage 4 is met. Some option clashes restrict opportunities for learning a language but the department has hosted extra courses outside the timetable to ensure that those who wish to study French or Spanish to GCSE level are not prevented from doing so.
- Provision is made for the very few students with home and heritage languages to take qualifications at GCSE level in their languages.
- The time provided for learning languages is adequate.
- A new vocational entry level qualification has been introduced into Year 9. This is aimed at improving students' interest in languages and in raising learner engagement at Key Stage 4. Students spoke positively

of this initiative, citing the usefulness of learning the language of business. It is, however, too early to assess the full impact of this initiative on learning and standards.

- Extra-curricular activities are limited. Some revision classes are held for Year 11 students prior to their final examinations. There are no educational trips to Europe or any clubs where students can learn about the culture of other countries.
- There are few authentic resources, such as magazines, newspapers or books which students can browse or read for pleasure.

## Leadership and management of ML

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- You are very supportive of ML and the senior leadership team knows the strengths and weaknesses of the department. You have plans to develop ML when the school moves into its new building. The school recognises the contribution ML can play in widening students' horizons.
- The subject leader is building up provision after a period of some considerable discontinuity in staffing and several major changes to the whole school curriculum.
- The department's self evaluation is good in a number of aspects. It analyses past results and identifies some weaknesses in provision. It does not identify ICT or students' intercultural understanding as key areas in need of development. The departmental handbook incorporates key school policies.
- The departmental action plan is satisfactory. It sets out a number of proposed developments and these are costed. Whilst a suitable target for increasing the take-up of languages at Key Stage 4 has been identified, there is little detail on how this will be systematically tackled.
- Data are well used to track students' assessments in the different areas of learning. However these are not yet systematically used to form an accurate picture of how close the department is to meeting its targets for Key Stage 3 or of the overall progress students are making.
- Strong links have been built up with a number of local primary schools and both members of staff visit these to teach French and Spanish. This is strengthening students' enthusiasm for languages. However, the department is at an early stage of assessing primary students' progress in ML and of using this information to inform teaching in Year 7.

## How close the school is to reaching the benchmarks for language take-up in Key Stage 4

- The take up of languages at Key Stage 4 is well below the bench mark of 50% set by the Secretary of State in 2006. In Year 10 some 4% of the cohort are studying a language. To some extent the recent major changes in the school's Key Stage 3 curriculum have made it difficult to increase engagement at Key Stage 4.

- The school is aware of the benchmark and in the most recent school development plan has set an initial target of 10% of take-up at Key Stage 4.
- Steps taken to increase engagement at Key Stage 4 include making recent course materials in Year 9 more interesting and explaining the importance of ML to groups of students in Year 9.

How well is ICT used by teachers and students to improve language learning?

This is inadequate.

- Students in Key Stage 3 do not have opportunities to use ICT in ML, for example to draft and redraft work, despite there being several ICT suites which can be booked for whole class activities.
- Teachers use ICT satisfactorily in lessons to introduce new concepts to reinforce learning and to give students experience of native speakers. In one Year 7 lesson students confidently manipulated words to form grammatically correct sentences.
- Data tracking is carried out using school ICT programs.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- providing students in Key Stage 3 with opportunities to use ICT to develop their language skills
- raising standards at Key Stage 3
- improving opportunities for developing students' speaking skills
- ensuring that data is analysed more robustly so that the department has a clear understanding of how well students are doing at Key Stage 3 and how close it is to meeting its targets
- improving students' intercultural understanding.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Ofsted gathers information on the immediate and longer-term impact of survey inspections, both on the institutions themselves, and with a view to improving its own processes. To this end, I should be grateful if you would complete the attached questionnaire and return it within the next ten days. We have also just sent a copy of the questionnaire by email. Please return your completed questionnaire to either the email or postal address on the form, not to me. We may also contact some schools by telephone after several months in order for us to gain a picture of longer-term impact. Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Tanya Harber Stuart  
Her Majesty's Inspector